

Migration and Cultural heritage in Aruba.

In the early years of the 20th century many workers throughout the Caribbean region were forced to seek employment and a better way of life in surrounding islands and countries.

This was characteristic of the period between 1900 - 1930. Due to the depression in many of the Caribbean economies after the abolishment of slavery skilled and not to skilled workers were contracted to work in economies which were relatively doing better than others. In fact this was for many in these islands a livelihood strategy coupled to societal aspirations. There are cases where some worked on the construction of the Panama Canal, others went to cut sugar cane in Cuba, others worked on building the railway system in Brazil and others were employed in the banana industry of Central America. These were common forms of climbing out of poverty.

Aruba ventured on becoming one of the wealthier small islands in the 1920's. The Lago oil company had set up house with the main purpose of refining crude oil and producing other related substances. Skilled and unskilled workers were contracted especially from the English speaking islands, which were then colonies of Great Britain. These workers came from Saint Martin in the North to Trinidad and Tobago in the South and included the islands between these two.

As it transpired these workers brought their social memory, their cultural habits, their religious affiliations and generally their way of life from their respective islands to Aruba. It has been recorded that the Carnival celebrations, which have now become uniquely Aruban were brought to these shores by these migrants. The essence of this lecture is to probe at the cultural and social contributions brought by these migrants to Aruba and offer an analysis of their remaining heritage and what this means to Arubans in general.

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Artwell Cain PhD is founder/director of Institute of Cultural Heritage & Knowledge. Before that he was from 2009 to August 2012 director of NiNsee (National institute of Dutch Slavery Past and Legacy). He attained his masters degree in cultural anthropology at the University at Utrecht in 1989. Afterwards, Cain gathered expertise as a science researcher in Utrecht among other places. He directed the Foundation for the Furtherance of the Well-being of Antilleans and Arubans at Rotterdam (1991 – 2000). He obtained his PhD in 2007 at the University at Tilburg, which dealt with the upward social mobility of migrant directors in Dutch organizations. He has edited the book "Tula slave rebellion in Curacao" (2009) and written and published various papers and essays pertaining to integration, citizenship, diversity policy, representation, issues of identity, the aftermath of Trans -Atlantic slavery and social mobility.